

Pecuchet. The Bouvards and Pecuchets, with thek credulous and pathetic longing to know the last word about everything, whether it can really be known or not, find balm for their tired souls in stark, dogmatic statements.

A new generalisation, whether true or not, gives them a sense of mastery over the Universe. Jargon, in particular, is for them a sort of magic; the demon is in your power, once you have uttered his mystic name. So that these sublime pronouncements of literary dictators are twice-blessed: they gratify the author, sunning himself on the eminence of a private Sinai; they delight the hearer with all the joys of illumination, discipleship, and feeling superior to the uninitiate vulgar—the usual motives on which crank religions thrive. And so this sort of criticism continues highly successful. For the Bouvards and Pecuchets must have their certainties, in hard black and white. Not for them to rest with Montaigne 'on the pillow of ignorance': they hope for the Philosopher's Stone at the bottom of a saucepan. Thus criticism ends by becoming > the theology or the alchemy of Art. That does not imply that it becomes at the same time consciously insincere.

What people in fact mean when they talk of poetry being 'in touch with the Absolute*', or 'Love speaking musically', is that they quite genuinely wish to pay compliments (surely superfluous) to Poetry; and, in thek frenzy to avoid the banal, use vague and abstract

words, preferably
of as many syllables as possible, to the end
that thek
readers may be as much in a mist as
themselves, and the
honour and glory of poetry be enhanced by
such meta-
physical noises. And, again, what people in
fact mean
when they say that 'Art demands a bleak and
uncom-
promising daylight', or 'impersonality', is
that they
themselves demand these things; being, or
wishing to
be, or wishing to appear to be, severe
intellectuals with